



**STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers: Frequently Asked Questions

What is viral hemorrhagic fever?

Viral hemorrhagic fever (VHF) is a group of illnesses caused by several distinct families of viruses, many of which cause severe, life-threatening disease. These illnesses are called “hemorrhagic” because they are often associated with bleeding.

Viruses associated with most VHFs are found naturally in animals, ticks and mosquitoes.

How do you get it?

Viruses causing hemorrhagic fever are initially spread to humans when:

- Humans have contact with urine, feces, saliva, or other bodily fluids from infected rodents.
- Infected mosquitoes or ticks bite a human.
- Humans crush an infected tick.
- Carriers may spread viruses to other animals such as livestock and pets which are then slaughtered or cared for by humans.
- In a bioterrorist attack, the viruses are aerosolized and released into the air.

Some viruses that cause hemorrhagic fever can spread from one person to another, once an initial person has become infected. This type of secondary transmission of the virus can occur directly, through close contact with infected people or their body fluids. It can also occur indirectly, through contact with objects, like syringes and needles, contaminated with infected body fluids.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of hemorrhagic fever appear between four to 21 days after exposure. The delayed onset of symptoms can allow the disease to spread over a large geographic area. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Muscle aches
- Loss of strength
- Exhaustion

Severe VHF cases often show signs of bleeding under the skin, in internal organs and from body openings such as the mouth, eyes, nose, or rectum.

Severely ill patients may also show signs of shock, coma, delirium, seizures and kidney failure.

How is viral hemorrhagic fever treated?

Patients are hospitalized and receive supportive therapy. There is no specific treatment for viral hemorrhagic fever.

Can viral hemorrhagic fever be prevented?

With the exception of yellow fever and Argentine hemorrhagic fever, for which vaccines have been developed, there is no protection against these diseases.

For those hemorrhagic fever viruses that can be transmitted from person to person, avoiding close physical contact with infected people and their body fluids is the most important way of controlling the spread.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to hemorrhagic fever?

Seek prompt medical attention. Notify healthcare provider of possible exposure. Limit your exposure to others if you are ill. Monitor your health by checking for fever or rash.

Can pets and other animals get hemorrhagic fever?

Yes, animals can get hemorrhagic fever. If you think your pet has been exposed, seek prompt veterinary attention for the animal. Disease can be transmitted from pets to humans by ticks, fleas and mosquitoes, or close contact with the animal or its body fluids.